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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KMDR KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Syrian Coverage of Ambassador Schulte's Pan-Arab Media Outreach

REF: 08 DAMASCUS 445

¶1. Summary: On Friday, December 12, U.S. Ambassador to the IAEA Greg Schulte conducted a series of interviews on the nascent Syrian nuclear program and related International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) actions with the pan-Arab media based in London. As part of this, Ambassador Schulte appeared with Syrian Ambassador Imad Mustafa on al-Jazeera's "Akthar Min Rai," hosted by Sami Haddad. The Syrian media did not carry any of the Ambassador's remarks. End Summary.

IAEA IS A RED LINE FOR JOURNALISTS IN SYRIA

¶12. (U) Ambassador Schulte's extensive round of pan-Arab media interviews went almost completely unreported by the Syrian media with the exception of two websites. The all4syria.info website, which is run out of Dubai, carried the Sharq al-Awsat interview. We have raised the Ambassador's al-Jazeera appearance with a few of our best contacts, several of whom confessed they had not seen it. Unfortunately, Ambassador Schulte's appearance on al-Jazeera coincided with the end of the long Eid Al-Adha vacation when many Syrians are out of the country.

¶13. (U) State-run media in Syria are strictly controlled, and the SARG's sensitivity to the IAEA issue is well-documented. In advance of the June 22-24, 2008 visit to Syria by the inspection team from the IAEA, the Syrian government denied entry to some foreign journalists and restricted journalists in Damascus from travel outside the city. At the time of the visit, one journalist told the IO that he had heard that the Syrians only agreed to the IAEA visit on the condition that there would be no press.

¶14. (U) Our sources continue to remind us that the SARG issued instructions for journalists not to report on this in June. As a result, the bulk of the June reporting came out of Vienna and other European capitals. There remains a lingering reluctance to engage on this story given the SARG's earlier order.

¶15. (U) Post continues to flag the interviews and Ambassador Schulte's statements on our website and with key contacts. We will

continue to make these points to lay the ground work for potential
backgrounders with the U.S. Mission in Vienna and journalists here.

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